

Heat pumps can counter Putin and the climate crisis, advocates say

Analysis by [Maxine Joselow](#)

with research by [Vanessa Montalbano](#)

March 10, 2022 at 8:02 a.m. EST

Good morning and welcome to The Climate 202! If you were on the Hill yesterday, we hope you got to pet [Johnny Cash the golden retriever](#), who accompanied **Sen. Lisa Murkowski** (R-Alaska) and seems like a very good boy. 🐶

 **House Democrats approved a roughly \$1.5 trillion spending package** last night to fund the federal government. The measure included a provision to stop U.S. imports of Russian oil, much as **President Biden** announced [this week](#). But first:

Heat pumps can counter Putin and climate change, advocates say. The White House is listening.

Last month, author and climate activist **Bill McKibben** proposed an unusual way that **President Biden** could simultaneously combat climate change and the war in Ukraine.

It all came down to heat pumps.

At the time, McKibben's musings largely flew under the radar. But today, the **White House** is seriously considering his plan, which would involve scaling up U.S. manufacturing of heat pumps and sending them overseas to counter Europe's reliance on Russian gas.

It's the latest instance of climate advocates and the Biden administration floating creative ways to curb dependence on fossil fuels, a leading cause of both climate change and Russian President Vladimir Putin's influence in Europe.

It's also a sign of the growing popularity of heat pumps, which have the potential to heat and cool thousands of homes using electricity instead of natural gas.

Here's what to know:

Heat pumps for peace

In a Feb. 27 **Substack** piece, McKibben argued that Biden should invoke the **Defense Production Act**, an emergency national defense law, “to get American manufacturers to start producing electric heat pumps in quantity, so we can ship them to Europe where they can be installed in time to dramatically lessen Putin’s power.”

McKibben compared the effort to the program established by the **Lend-Lease Act** of 1941, in which the United States sent critical supplies to Allied nations that had been invaded by Germany in **World War II**.

About a week later, as White House aides were gearing up to announce a ban on U.S. imports of Russian oil, they discussed this very idea, The Washington Post's **Jeff Stein, Tyler Pager** and **Anna Phillips** reported Tuesday, citing three people with knowledge of the matter who spoke on the condition of anonymity to discuss private deliberations.

As of Wednesday, White House aides were still seriously studying the idea, although they recognized that it could go through the congressional appropriations process, a personal familiar with the matter told Jeff.

In an interview with The Climate 202 yesterday, McKibben acknowledged that he had discussed his plan with Biden administration officials, although he declined to name names.

“It's very exciting to see people picking up on this,” McKibben said. “I think it's probably happening less because of the brilliance of my prose and more because it's a really natural idea. It follows exactly what happened the last time there was a land war in Europe.”

Heating up

The idea got another boost when more than 200 groups released a letter yesterday urging Biden to invoke the Defense Production Act to turbocharge deployment of clean energy technologies, including heat pumps and battery storage.

The organizations signing the letter included the **Center for Biological Diversity, Indigenous Environmental Network** and **Oil Change International**.

“We're in a moment in which [Biden] is assuming the mantle of executive action,” **Collin Rees**, the U.S. program manager at **Oil Change International**, told The Climate 202. “We saw that with the oil import ban by executive order. And there's so much more that he could be doing.”

Also on Wednesday, the group **Rewiring America** released a three-part plan for America to help Europe slash its dependence on Russian gas by next winter. The plan calls for building U.S. manufacturing capacity for heat pumps and sending civilian volunteers to install the technology in Europe and Britain.

The impact

Sarah Ladislaw, a managing director at **RMI**, an organization devoted to the clean energy transition, questioned whether heat pumps alone would have a significant impact on European gas demand immediately, noting the need for long-term deployment.

Ladislaw pointed to a recent **International Energy Agency** report, which found that doubling current E.U. installation rates of heat pumps would save **2 billion** cubic meters of gas use within the first year. But if everyone in a European building turned down the thermostat by 1 degree Celsius, they would save around **10 billion** cubic meters.

“There are limits to what [heat pumps] can deliver in the short term, although that is true of every potential solution to Europe's dependence on Russian gas in the short term,” Ladislaw said.

But **Ari Matusiak**, the CEO of Rewiring America, told The Climate 202 that heat pumps have a big advantage over behavioral changes: They last for 20 years and don't depend on someone repeatedly remembering to turn down their thermostat.

“In policy and politics, you don't always have an opportunity to deliver a real win-win-win,” he added. “This is that. And it will deliver value long past when Putin is no longer in power.”

On the Hill

Bill would stop Postal Service from buying gas-powered delivery trucks

One day after the Senate passed a major spending bill to reform the **U.S. Postal Service** that did not include a provision to force the agency to go electric, **Rep. Gerald E. Connolly** (D-Va.) on Wednesday introduced legislation to stop the agency from purchasing a new fleet of delivery vehicles unless at least 75 percent of them are emissions-free.

The bill, backed by 68 other lawmakers, follows a decision last month by Postmaster General **Louis DeJoy** to finalize a contract with **Oshkosh Defense** to replace vehicles that are nearly 30 years old with a fleet consisting of 90 percent gas-powered vehicles, despite previous calls from the Biden administration to electrify all federal vehicles. The Postal Service is home to one-third of the country's entire federal fleet.

Agency alert

Granholm tells oil executives to boost output at CERAWeek

Energy Secretary **Jennifer Granholm** on Wednesday urged oil companies to increase supply to counter soaring gas prices amid Russia's invasion of Ukraine, while emphasizing that the industry needs to transition to renewable energy in the long term to combat climate change.

"In this moment of crisis we need more supply," Granholm said during her keynote address at the **CERAWeek** energy conference in Houston. "Right now we need oil and gas production to rise to meet current demand."

At the same time, Granholm said the Biden administration wants to act as a partner with the oil industry to accelerate the transition to a clean energy economy, even as some in the fossil fuel industry have chafed at Biden's climate policies.

"We have to still reckon with the impact of climate change. We can walk and chew gum at the same time," she said, adding that "to be on the right side of history, we have to work together."

EPA restores California's ability to set tougher emissions rules for cars

The Biden administration on Wednesday announced that it is reinstating California's authority to set tougher limits than the federal government on climate-warming emissions from cars, pickups and SUVs.

The Post's **Dino Grandoni** explains to readers that **Barack Obama** first secured California's waiver under the **Clean Air Act**, which allows the state to act independently on curbing tailpipe emissions. But the Trump administration froze fuel efficiency standards and stripped California of this authority in 2019.

Now, with a new waiver, the state can prod automakers to make even deeper emissions cuts without the federal government's help. And more than a dozen other states have already committed to follow California's lead on greenhouse gas pollution from cars.

Pressure points

Fact check: Republicans wrongly blame Biden for high gas prices

Top Republican lawmakers have blamed soaring gas prices on **President Biden** and his energy policies this week. But they have relied on some misleading talking points, according to a fact check by the New York Times's Linda Qiu.

GOP lawmakers have argued that pain at the pump came long before the war in Ukraine. They have sought to connect the price spikes to Biden's decision to revoke a key permit of the **Keystone XL pipeline** and temporarily halt new drilling leases on public lands. But in reality, the coronavirus pandemic was largely responsible for the price surge in the past year, and the conflict in Ukraine has only compounded the issue.

Even if Biden had greenlighted the Keystone XL pipeline, it is highly unlikely that it would be operational before 2023, as only 8 percent of it had been built when he took office. And in its first year, the Biden administration approved 34 percent more drilling permits on federal lands than the Trump administration did in its first year, according to data compiled by the **Center for Biological Diversity**. Regardless, those permits were for production in three to four years, not right now.

Climate solutions

Meat demand is destroying the Amazon. Smarter choices at the dinner table might help.

The world's rapidly increasing appetite for cheap meat is fueling deforestation of the Amazon rainforest, **Richard Schiffman** reports for The Post. Forest advocates say that millions of acres of the Amazon are being replaced by farmland to grow animal feed and to make space for grazing cattle, in large part because of consumer demand far from the forest in the United States and Europe.

Some experts say that the best way to end the destruction is to persuade consumers to purchase only meat products that have been sustainably produced on non-rainforest-cleared land. But smart consumer choices to boycott certain products are only part of the solution. There also needs to be systemic action from policymakers and corporations.

In October, **Sen. Brian Schatz** (D-Hawaii) and **Reps. Earl Blumenauer** (D-Ore.) and **Brian Fitzpatrick** (R-Pa.) introduced legislation to ban commodities from illegally deforested land from entering the United States. Environmental groups are rallying behind the legislation, with some arguing that the carbon-intensive meat industry should be phased out to make way for more environmentally friendly food production.

Viral

Silver linings? 🕸

Good news is rare and to be celebrated wherever it's found these days. So let's tip our hats to the fact that, despite everything going on, at least "the spider's fangs are virtually incapable of breaking human

skin." <https://t.co/5HCIJTMk4>

— Eric Roston (@eroston) [March 8, 2022](#)

Thanks for reading!